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ABSTRACT

Parameters of intrafamilial discord have been identified in this study by examining interaction in the family of orientation, establishing their relationship to alcoholism in the invididual. The sample was comprised of 96 problem drinkers, both public and private patients, who are receiving help from Straight and Narrow Incorporated, Paterson, New Jersey and from the Marlboro Alcoholic Recovery Unit in New Jersey. A matched population of non-drinkers (96) was also utilized for comparison purposes with the sample of problem drinkers, in respect to familial variables. A 75-item inventory was used during an interviewing situation to collect data. In addition, a special 12-item Alcoholism Detection Inventory (A.D.I.) was utilized to compare scores on the A.D.I. between the alcoholics and the non-alcoholics. Using the theoretical framework of the family as a sub-system indicates that it is a combination of familial variables which influences a person to become a problem drinker. (Author)

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ALCOHOLISM AND THE IMPACT OF INTRAFAMILIAL DISCORD - AFFECT PARAMETERS: A CONCEPTUAL UTILIZATION OF THE FAMILY AS A SUB-SYSTEM

By

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A review of both the sociological and psychological research has indicated that the family is the mediating agency between the individual and society and thus can be considered as providing the environment in which predisposing and precipitating factors leading to alcoholism occur.[1] For example, researchers such as Robert Bell[2], Frank J. Curran[3], Georgio Lolli[4], H. Massot[5], and R.J. Van Amberg[6], have suggested that parents have an influencing role in the etiology of alcoholism. Viewing familial roles, William and Joan McCord state that "In our opinion, American values contribute to alcoholism by increasing role confusion and contributing to dependency conflict among those whose dependency needs have been heightened by their familial environments. Thus, in our view, interpersonal relations within the family are the key to alcoholism."[7] In addition, familial attitudes about drinking, have been considered one of the major ways in which alcoholism is subjected to social control.

Also, since many professionals who work with alcoholics have observed a consistency in certain types of family patterns associated with the problem drinker - the Parsonian concept of the family as a social system (sub-system), has been adopted here for identifying influencing factors in relationship to alcoholic behavior. The family is regarded as the milieu which predisposes the individual in our society to alcoholism.

Parents influence the structure of the family, and therefore, fundamentally determine the interpersonal interactive processes. The adjustments within a family represent the nature of these interrelationships and reciprocal interactions of its members. Within the family system, the personality development of the child is influenced by each member

and in turn, influences every other member, thus personality disorders and disturbances in social adaptation can be understood only if considered within the context of family interaction.[8]

Interaction in the family was viewed to help identify parameters of intrafamilial discord. Specifically, family interaction was studied in the sub-system within the family of ofientation. The researchers then looked at the relationship of these factors to the progression of alcoholism in the individual. The family in this research is viewed as a small and highly differentiated social system.[9] More specifically the nuclear family is itself a sub-system. Thus, the focus is on the relationships between the parents, the mother and child, and the father and child.

The mother - father - child triad is the conceptual framework, (patterned on Parsonian analysis) utilized in this study, since the sub-system is where the basic interpersonal interaction takes place and is, therefore, the basis of personality development. And assuming that personality, for the most part, is formed within the triangular system of the nuclear family and then, that personality maladaption must also primarily stem from this unit, the following hypotheses emerged for examination:

1. The family of orientation of the alcoholic is characterized by parental conflict, discord, and disorganization which frequently results in separation, desertion, or divorce;

2. The male alcoholic comes from a home where the mother is Close - Binding - Intimate (C.B.I.);[10]

3. The home of the alcoholic is characterized by the mother having a minimizing, frequently, rejecting attitude toward the father;

4. The mother of a female alcoholic displays a syndrome of behavior which includes rejection, resentment, and neglect toward this daughter r.r.n.);

5. The father in such a family plays a minimal role in family decision-making, indeed may be absent at intervals;

6. The father of the alcoholic tends to be detached (discontinuous contact is part of the father's design for living), hostile, detached - hostile, and/or detached - ambivalent (father possesses some positive paternal attitudes);

7. Parents of alcoholics in dealing with the child tend to fluctuate from overindulgence to abuse. Adlerians view alcoholism as representing a striving for power which compensates for a pervasive feeling of inferiority. Here it is assumed that this person's feelings of inferiority stem from a childhood characterized by a home where overindulgent parents did not permit him to learn how to cope with problems of adult life;

8. The problem drinker is part of a reference group (including the parent(s) as significant others which support his deviant behavior; and

9. Where convivial drinking is present to a great degree in the home, the person is likely to be an alcoholic.

The research design was constructed to test these nine hypotheses.

DESIGN OF STUDY

SAMPLE

A sample of 96 problem drinkers (66 males and 30 females), both public and private patients who were receiving help from Straight and

Narrow Incorporated, Paterson, New Jersey and from the Marlboro Alcoholic Recovery Unit in Marlboro, New Jersey was selected. The public clients who appeared for help (and were there because of court referrals) and the private patients (who were sponsored by Alcoholics Anonymous) were interviewed. This sample was investigated in reference to number, age, race, religion, and educational level attained by the respondents, and the educational level of the respondent's parents.

A matched sample of 96 individuals (64 males and 32 females) not identified as alcoholics was selected in order to be compared to the groups of problem drinkers. They were drawn from areas comparable to Paterson and Marlboro with the criteria of numbers, age, race, religion, respondents' parents taken into consideration.

Both samples (male and female) of alcoholics and those of non-alcoholics were tested for equivalence and were found to be equivalent; the data (in terms of the indicated criteria) can be observed in Figure 1.

FIGURE I

Distributions Among Alcoholic And Non-Alcoholic Samples In Respect To Sample Equivalence Criteria

Criteria	Sample	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other
1. Religion	male alcoholics	27.3%	62.5%	1.5%	1.5%
	male non-alcoholics	28.1%	69.6%	6.3%	3.2%
	female alcoholics	43.3%	50.0%	6.7%	0%
	female non-alcoholics	40.6%	46.9%	9.4%	3.1%
2. Race		White	Black	Other - Non-White	
	male alcoholics	93.9%	6.1%	- - -	
	male non-alcoholics	93.8%	6.2%	- - -	
	female alcoholics	83.3%	13.3%	3.3%	
	female non-alcoholics	87.5%	9.4%	3.1%	

3. Age	Mean	s.d.
male alcoholics	41 years	12 years
male non-alcoholics	40	13
female alcoholics	42	11
female non-alcoholics	37	12

4. Numbers	Number Sample
male alcoholics	66
male non-alcoholics	64
female alcoholics	30
female non-alcoholics	32

5. Education of Respondents	Mean Years of Education	s.d.
male alcoholics	11.4 years	2.67 years
male non-alcoholics	12.1	2.67
female alcoholics	11.8	2.27
female non-alcoholics	11.9	1.48

6. Education of Respondents Father	Mean Years of Education	s.d.
male alcoholics	8.6 years	3.82 years
male non-alcoholics	8.4	4.16
female alcoholics	10.0	3.87
female non-alcoholics	10.2	4.00

7. Education of Respondents Mother	Mean Years of Education	s.d.
male alcoholics	9.2 years	3.07 years
male non-alcoholics	8.6	3.48
female alcoholics	10.0	3.06
female non-alcoholics	10.0	3.30

METHODOLOGY

A seventy-five item inventory was designed and pre-tested with a selected sample, revised, and then used as an interviewing instrument for gathering data from both the sample of alcoholics and the matched sample (the non-alcoholics).

The inventory was constructed so that eight to ten different items would refer to each of the nine family behavioral variables indicated by the study's hypotheses, and each item response was scored on a five point scale (1 to 5) to facilitate obtaining mean scores of the eight to ten items associated with each of the hypotheses (the nine independent variables). The purpose of this scoring was to determine if the mean scores of the "alcoholics" differed significantly from those of the "non-alcoholics" in respect to the nine family behavioral independent variables, and a t-test for independent samples was used to test the differences.

A special 12 item Alcoholism Detection Inventory[11] was also administered to both the alcoholic and non-alcoholic samples and the resulting data was then translated into five-point scores to facilitate analysis. Specifically, the researcher's utilized this procedure to investigate:

1. The significance of the differences between scores obtained by the alcoholics and those of the non-alcoholics; thus validating (if possible) the A.D.I.'s (Alcoholism Detection Inventory's) use in clinical situations. A t-test for independent samples was employed to test this difference.

2. Whether the nine family behavior independent variables (among the alcoholics) were related to scores on the A.D.I.; thus presenting the possibility of the Inventory's being used as a valid "springboard" for counseling and treatment; and

3. Whether the A.D.I. did in fact measure the "degree of alcoholism."

The data from the A.D.I. permitted a multi-correlational analysis between the independent variables and the scores on the A.D.I., thus it

could be investigated as to whether scores on the Inventory were significantly related to single independent variables or to multi-variable interactions.

Pearsonian coefficients, tested by the appropriate "t" statistic, were employed to investigate the independent variables as single first-order functions of alcoholic detection scores (the dependent variable); and multi-correlation Pearsonian coefficients, tested for significance by the appropriate "F" statistic, were utilized to investigate multi-variable second-order interactions of the independent variables in relationship to the alcoholic detection scores.

RESULTS

In considering the relationships of the nine independent variables to alcoholism, when considering the sample of those identified as alcoholics as compared to those who were in the non-alcoholic sample, analysis of the data showed that the following factors were found to be significantly associated with the sample of male alcoholics:

1. Parental discord and disorganization in the respondent's family of orientation. ($p < .01$). McCord and McCord also cite parental conflict as a predisposing variable in their study of 255 boys. Indeed they report that intense family conflict was positively related to alcoholism. ($p < .02$). And when found in combination with certain other factors it may have predisposed the person to alcoholism. "It seems reasonable, therefore, that families disrupted by conflict would produce persons characterized by a high degree of inner tension. Such people would be likely to seek one of alcohol's more potent qualities, its ability to reduce anxiety."[12]

2. The father's playing a minimal role in family decision-making. ($p < .01$). Closely related to lack of the father's decision-making is one of the findings of the McCords, that paternal absence combined with other variables was particularly productive of alcoholism.

3. The parent's (of the alcoholic) fluctuating from overindulgence to abuse when dealing with the child. ($p < .05$).

Here McCord and McCord only report findings related to mother's behavior. Mothers who alternated between affection and rejection produced the highest proportion of alcoholic sons, and actively affectionate mothers produced the lowest proportion of alcoholic sons. ($p < .005$).[13]

Both the parental conflict and the maternal relation to the child apparently influenced the rate of alcoholism and were not simply reflections of the other.

4. All the variables combined as one total factor. ($p < .02$).

The following factors were not found to be significantly associated with the sample of male alcoholics:

1. A home with a close-binding-intimate mother.

This finding agrees with that of the McCords, "that boys conditioned by strong encouragement of dependency did not become alcoholic more often than boys who were relatively independent of their mothers."[14]

2. The mother's having a minimizing, rejecting attitude toward the father.

3. A detached, hostile ambivalent father.

4. The respondent's being part of a reference group (of significant others) which supports his deviant behavior.

5. Where a great degree of convivial drinking is present.

Looking at the sample of female alcoholics, the factors found to be significant were:

1. Parental discord and disorganization in the female respondents family of orientation. ($p < .001$).

This supports data gathered by Barry Kinsey in his study of female alcoholics. Kinsey found that only 50% of his sample's parents "were married or living together regularly when the respondent was living at home."[15] He also found that chronic conflict and personal instability were common characteristics of these families. According to Kinsey, the most outstanding item was the almost complete absence of any stable life.

In addition, while Howard Wood and Edward Duffy did not refer to parental discord and disorganization per se, they do report that "none" of the parental marriages of the female alcoholics in their sample could be considered a happy relationship with mutual affection.[16]

2. The mother's having a minimizing rejecting attitude toward the father. ($p < .001$).

3. The mother's displaying rejection, resentment, and neglect (r.r.n.) to the daughter. ($p < .05$).

Wood and Duffy found that all their patients described their mothers as rigid, emotionally distant, and unable to give love. No patient felt that she had been raised in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.[17]

4. The father's playing a minimal role in decision-making. ($p < .01$). Both Massot[18] and Lolli[19] found that a combination of domineering aggressive mothers and weak passive fathers had etiological significance.

5. The problem drinker's being part of a reference group (of significant others) which supports her deviant behavior. ($p < .05$).

6. All the variables combined as one total factor. ($p < .001$).

The following factors were not found to be significantly associated with the samples of female alcoholics:

1. A detached hostile, ambivalent father.
2. The parent's (of the alcoholic) fluctuating from overindulgence to abuse when dealing with the child.
3. Where a great degree of convivial drinking is present.

SCORES OF RESPONDENTS ON THE ALCOHOLISM DETECTION INVENTORY

When looking at the relationship of the nine variables to the alcoholism scores obtained by the male and female alcoholics on the Alcoholism Detection Inventory, the following factors were found to be significantly related to the alcoholism detection scores among the male alcoholics:

1. Parental discord and disorganization.
   ($r = .37$; $p < .01$)
2. The mother having a minimizing rejecting attitude toward the father.
   ($r = .37$; $p < .01$)
3. A high degree of convivial drinking.
   ($r = .40$; $p < .01$)
4. The total of all the variables as one factor was
   ($r = .39$; $p < .01$)

The following factors wererfound to be significantly related to scores on the alcoholism detection inventory among the female alcoholics:

1. Parental discord and disorganization. ($r = .54$; $p < .01$)

2. The R.R.N. mother and the hostile, ambivalent detached father (as a second order multiple correlation consideration. ($r = .37$; $p < .01$). Here, neither of these two variables was related to alcoholism scores by themselves, but the multiple correlation yielded the indicated significant relationship).

Investigating factors related to the alcoholism detection scores, the researchers tried to identify independent variables with a high correlation to the dependent variable and a low correlation with each other. Computing a series of all the possible multiple correlations only yielded the two variables (RRN mothers plus ambivalent detached fathers) as contributing to each others possible predictor ability.

Looking at the scores on the Alcoholism Detection Inventory when considering both alcoholics and non-alcoholics it was found that the degree of Alcoholism scores of the sample of alcoholics were significantly higher than those of the non-alcoholics. ($p < .001$).

Although the design was not constructed to factor out age, number of years of heavy drinking, race, religion, and educational background of the respondents and their parents as being related to the findings of this study, the data yielded no evidence (in this sample of course) that any of the variables investigated were related to either: 1) differences among alcoholics and non-alcoholics; and 2) scores as indicated by the Alcoholism Detection Inventory (when considering only the male and female alcoholics).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION RESULTS

The results of this research indicates that looking at the family as a system and as a sub-system yields important data in studying

alcoholism. This position is supported in work done by Kinsey and the McCords who have also suggested that parental factors have an influencing role in the etiology of alcoholism. In addition, investigators such as Bell, Lolli, Massot, and Van Amberg also mentioned the following as being influencing factors: (1) maladjustment among fathers,[20] (2) a combination of domineering, aggressive mothers and weak passive fathers,[21] and (3) overprotecting domineering parents.[22]

The factor found to be significant in relationship to just the male becoming an alcoholic was the parent's fluctuating from overindulgence to abuse when dealing with the child. This supports the position found in psychological theories (particularly Adlerian) that maternal pampering and overprotection are influencing variables in relationship to becoming an alcoholic. The factors found to be significantly associated with just the sample of female alcoholics utilized in the study were, the mother's having a minimizing rejecting attitude toward the father, the mother's displaying rejection, resentment and neglect to the daughter, and the woman herself being part of a reference group (of significant others) which supports her drinking behavior.

The factors that were associated with alcoholism for <u>both</u> men and women were the father's playing a minimal role in family and <u>parental discord and family disorganization</u>.

It appears in this study, that family behavior patterns seem to have a greater effect on the female's alcoholic behavior than on the male's. Perhaps this is an indictment of our culture where the socialization process makes females more dependent than males. Over a generation ago Mirra Komarovsky stated that girls had greater attachment to their

families, and that there was evidence that excessive ties to parents were dysfunctional for both sexes.[23]

In addition to this study's identifying some of the factors related to alcoholism, the data collected and analyzed from the Alcoholism Inventory indicate promising further use of this instrument in detection, counseling, self-awareness, prevention, treatment, and future research.

While this study has identified some of the factors found within the sub-system of the family which are related to alcoholism, there is no single family variable which influences a person to become a problem drinker, it is, more likely, a combination.

This study also raises certain specific questions for further research: 1) how do we identify areas of actual and potential parental conflict which influence both male and female alcoholics? and 2) can we through therapy or counseling, minimize such conflict and strengthen family roles? In addition, a larger area of study which presents itself is how do we change the socialization process in the family orientation so that family patterns do not have a greater effect on either sex in relationship to the etiology of alcoholism?

Since, alcoholism is known to be the third most serious medical problem in the United States today (one out of eighteen people of employable age are problem drinkers) pursuing such knowledge is essential if we are to effectively counsel families and their members in dealing with alcoholism. Thus, such knowledge added to that obtained from other orientations, such as the physiological, and psychological should contribute to methods of treatment for the alcoholic and his or her family which are both specific and effective.

There is little question but that there is a need for more scientific testing of sociological theories. Thus, using the described theoretical framework of the family as a sub-system (which has proved useful here) should provide greater insight into alcoholism as it provides the researchers with an orientation from which to identify those variables which are rooted in family structure that relate to problem drinking.

NOTES

1. Psychological explanations seemed to be based on three main theoretical approaches: 1) The Freudian, which analyzes alcoholism as a result of one or more of the unconscious tendencies - self destruction, oral fixation and latent homosexuality; 2) The Adlerian view, that alcoholism represents a struggle for power, a reaction to a pervasive feeling of inferiority. Another aspect of the Adlerian position is that alcoholism is the result of maternal pampering and overprotection (other psychologists also take this position); and 3) The view that alcoholism develops as a response to an inner conflict between dependency drives and aggressive impulses.

The sociological orientations for studying problem drinking are categorized as follows: 1) Analyzing attitudes and values of different populations. Robert Bales discusses four different types of attitudes which seem to affect the rates of alcoholism. (R. F. Bales, "Cultural Difference in Rate of Alcoholism," in McCarthy, R. G., ed., Drinking and Intoxication. New York: Free Press, 1959, pp. 263-277). 2) Viewing culture and social organization as influencing the rates of alcoholism. (See Bales for a discussion on three ways that both systems exert influence). 3) Considering drinking as a symptom, such behavior may be viewed as a nearly universal custom, one that has survived because of its high acceptability and functionality in society. (D. Horton, "Primitive Societies" in McCarthy, R. G., ed., Drinking and Intoxication. New York: Free Press, 1959, pp. 251-262); and 4) Considering alcoholic abuse as deviant behavior. The deviant behavior theories consist of the anomie theory of deviance (see R. K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure. New York: Free Press, 1957); the social and cultural support theory where the analysis deals with the support the problem drinker gets from a subculture for his deviant behavior as opposed to those groups which define this behavior as deviant; and the societal reaction or labeling theory which describes the alcoholic who is labeled deviant because of a set of experiences and is, therefore, forced by societal reaction to assume the "deviant role." (See E. M. Lemert, Human Deviance, Social Problems and Social Control. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

2. Robert Bell, "Alcohol and loneliness", Journal of Social Therapy, 2 (1956), pp. 171-181.

3. Frank J. Curran, "Personality studies in alcoholic women", Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorders, 86 (December, 1937), pp. 645-667.

4. Giorgio Lolli, "Alcoholism in women", Connecticut Review of Alcoholism, vol. 5, no. 3, (November, 1953), pp. 9-11.

5. H. Massot, "Alcoholism of feminin: donnees statistiques et psychopathologiques", Journal de Medeceine de Lyon, 37 (1956), pp. 265-269.

6. Robert J. Van Amberg, "A study of 50 women patients hospitalized for alcohol addiction", Diseases of the Nervous System, vol. 4, no. 8, (August, 1943), pp. 246-251.

7. William McCord and Joan McCord, Origins of Alcoholism. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 87.

8. Nathan W. Ackerman, The Psychodynamics of Family Life. (New York: Basic Books, 1958).

9. Talcott Parsons, and R.F. Bales, Family Socialization and Interaction. (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955). Parsons and Bales have emphasized that the nuclear family is not an independent unit but one that interpenetrates with structures and systems in a broader society.

10. Irving Bieber, Homosexuality. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1962). According to Bieber, the outstanding characteristic of this type of mother is the extraordinary intimacy with their sons. They exert a binding influence through preferential treatment and seductiveness and onehand and inhibiting overcontrolling attitudes on the other. While Bieber used this description for homosexual sons, the present researchers believe that similar traits are exhibited by mothers of male alcoholics.

11. The Alcoholism Detection Inventory is used at Straight and Narrow Incorporated, a rehabilitative facility in Paterson, New Jersey.

12. McCord, p. 47.

13. Ibid, chapter 4.

14. Ibid, chapter 4.

15. Barry Kinsey, The Female Alcoholic. (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1966), p. 92.

16. Howard P. Wood and Edward L. Duffy, "Psychological Factors in Alcoholic Women," American Journal of Psychiatry 123: 3, (September, 1966), pp. 341-345.

17. Ibid.

18. H. Massot, pp. 265-269.

19. G. Lolli, pp. 9-11.

20. Van Amberg, pp. 246-251.

21. Massot, pp. 265-269 and Lolli, pp. 9-11.

22. Bell, pp. 171-181.

23. Mirra Komarovsky, "Functional Analysis of Sex Roles," American Sociological Review, 15 (August, 1950), pp. 508-518.